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ABSTRACT

The suggestions in this paper offer some alternatives to the traditional perfunctory "remedial" programs that open the doors to hundreds of students and then fail to followup on the students' progress. General objectives of a basic skills program for open-admissions inner-city students should include the following: (1) To help each student increase self-confidence in his ability to develop proficiency in reading and interpreting new materials, writing, and oral expression. (2) To raise each student's level of reading, writing, and oral presentation ability so that the newly-learned skills will contribute to his success in academic college subjects. (3) To help each student develop the ability to transfer the basic skills learned to college subject matter areas. (4) To develop positive attitudes regarding learning, self-responsibility, inner motivation, and discipline that will serve as reinforcement for success in academic work in college. (5) To develop the study and research techniques necessary for academic success in college. Ideally, each learning experience would include four stages: introductory; development, analysis, and study; generalization; application, summary, and culmination. Evaluation of student performance would be evaluated by observation of performance and application skills learned, taped responses, anecdotal records, self-evaluation measures, and objective achievement tests. (MJM)

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# THE OPEN ADMISSIONS FRESHMAN PROGRAM and BASIC SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

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I have asked myself and others many times, "Where is the Open Admissions Program going?" Our students in the New York City schools are reading on second and third grade level in the fifth grade. By the time they reach junior high, many have given up any interest in achieving. They are pushed through high school, and if they manage to survive, our colleges open the doors and say, "Y'all come."

Here, on the college level, I have seen students with many attitudes about coming to college - there are those who come with little or no intention of doing more than picking up their financial aid check. There are those who are willing to try if the work is not too hard. There are those who come for the traditional reasons - to broaden their world, to develop skills, to graduate and get out and compete successfully. There are also those for whom college represents a 'last chance.' Life has buffeted them about, but they are still willing to try once more. We have said, "Welcome," but are we really prepared for them?

What are their expectations of themselves? What are their expectations of the college? What are the major academic problems of the students? What are the characteristics of successful college students - of college dropouts - of probationary students?

Eventually, each college will, or should, have the answers to these questions, based upon examination of its own student population. Wisconsin College analyzed the study havits of its students

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and developed a program to help students overcome certain avoidance mechanisms. The program involved a combination of counseling, lectures, and individual assistance. Although Wisconsin is a junior college, freshman instructional needs can be compared with those of freshmen in an Open Admissions college. It was found that the best basis of instruction is one in which there is a great deal of personal instruction, and administrators interested in freshman programs are warned against using packaging and programming as the only devices for meeting the needs of students whose skills are below college level.

Tennessee Technical University perceived that often a student's estimation of his achievement is more accurate than teacher or peer evaluation. However, they also found that a student's self-evaluation was more accurate at the beginning of the semester than in the middle or at the end. An interesting factor was that older students tended to be more accurate than younger students.

The National Reading Center in Washington, D.C. noted that 1/3 of the entering freshmen (nation-wide) in 1972 lacked the basic skills needed for minimal success in college. According to their information, the stress today in most colleges at this level is: guidance, individualized instruction, and counseling. The major problems of college personnel in these freshman programs are dealing with the problem of motivation and helping students apply the new skills learned to other course work.

A study conducted by Jonathan Warren, Psychologist from Berkeley, California revealed the following to be necessary ingredients for college success:

1. Motivation (described by over 300 faculty members as commitment and interest)

2. Verbal aptitude (found to be necessary by the social science faculty)

3. Problem-solving ability (found to be necessary by faculty in the natural sciences, engineering, and business)

Studies conducted from 1956 to 1968 list the following as personality characteristics of the college dropout and/or probetionary student. It will readily be seen, however, that some of these factors are not personality characteristics per se, but causes and/or effects of lack of success:

poorly adjusted to school situation

rigidity in thought and action

males: irresponsible, non-conforming

females: withdrawn, introverted, depressed, social isolate

financial problems, poor academic performance, lack of motivation, emotional difficulties

agressive

suspicious, oversensitive, egotistical

hostility, anxiety, lack of interest in literature

dislike for abstract thought

differing value patterns

It could be asked, why did or does the student resist "abstract thought?" Does he dislike it or is he resistant because it is not as familiar as the concrete? The most obvious question for those designing a program would be, "What can we do to build skill in the processes necessary for college success"?

A survey conducted by this writer of the faculty of various divisions of a predominantly Black inner-city four-year college indicates their observations of the characteristics of the

successful college student. They felt that these students have the ability to:

a. Look for details

b. Separate the relevant from irrelevant

c. Remember details

d. Understand the concept behind vocabulary terms

e. Interpret illustrative and graphic materials

f. Read and paraphrase

g. Locate information from various textbooks

h. Locate and read the same topic in various textbooks

i. Identify the parts and know the uses of the parts of a book - including the glossary

j. See connections between ideas

k. Survey a chapter before reading to get a general picture of the theme or objective

l. Interpret similar ideas or data which is presented in different forms and styles

m. Use analytical and logical thinking skills

n. Interpret material literally and critically

The significance of the above is that there are obviously many factors involved in planning a program for students who have had marginal or deficient pre-college educational experiences. Our students are multi-faceted and our Open Admissions Freshman Programs must reflect this by including as many components as possible to meet the students' needs.

The question, "Are we really prepared for our students?" elicits further questions which demand answers:

1. Is there a difference in probably academic success between entering freshmen 23 and younger who read 8.0

to 12.9 and those on the same reading level who are 24 and older?

2. Do students want to be with the same ability group or in a heterogeneous setting?
3. In which setting do they function best?
4. How can Open Admissions colleges provide the basic skills development so necessary to the academic survival of many students?
5. Can Open Admissions college programs provide freshmen students with the affective skills needed for survival?

The foregoing discussion points to the fact that Open Admissions students who have basic skill needs also have other needs. Designers of college basic skills programs would do well to keep these needs in mind, remembering that each student is unique in that his special life space causes each to view the same phenomenon differently from the other because of his own experiences. Each student will react to a curriculum based on the view from his life space which is a compendium of the affective and cognitive.

Curriculum content, therefore, is meaningful only as it is deemed to be so by each learner. A backward glance at the personality characteristics of some students and the academic demands of college departments gives us several clues to the direction in which freshman-oriented programs should and should not go.

The general objectives of a basic skills program for Open Admissions inner city students should include the following:

A. To help each student increase self-confidence in his ability to develop proficiency in reading and interpreting new materials, writing, and oral expression.

B. To raise each student's level of reading, writing and oral presentation ability so that the newly-learned skills will contribute to his success in academic college subjects.

C. To help each student develop the ability to transfer the basic skills learned to college subject matter areas.

D. To develop positive attitudes regarding learning, self-responsibility, inner motivation, and discipline which will serve as reinforcement for success in academic work in college.

E. To develop the study and research techniques necessary for academic success in college.

The objectives can be met by a program consisting of diagnosis of skills needs, personality assessment, sociometric data gathering, individually prescribed performance objectives, experiences to achieve the objectives, a system of evaluation, and frequent individual conferences. The emphasis must be on learning - not on teaching, to enhance the probability of acquisition of skills and transfer. Each student will learn by performing the tasks he/she needs to do in order to develop proficiency.

Through emphasizing the <u>principles</u> of basic skill development, providing opportunities for application of these principles in many situation, and providing learning experiences <u>before</u> expecting application, students will be able to transfer these learned skills to other content areas.

Students will show more growth through emphasis on the learner, learning and ways to promote learning, as opposed to the traditional emphasis on <u>teaching</u>.

It must be remembered that the student with underdeveloped basic skills is a total person - not simply a computer to be fed information. This is particularly true of the underachieving student who obviously has not developed the basis academic skills because of interference in his particular life space. Often, because of anxiety, such a student will exhibit negative attitudes which further interfere with academic success. Each student's needs must be diagnosed to find out where he is. He must then be provided with learning experiences which will be geared toward meeting his cognitive and affective needs. This can be achieved by use of specialists in basic skill development, counselors, and clear-cut objectives. Students whould benefit if program designers heeded the findings of research and avoided the exclusive use of machines, programmed materials and lectures. Rather, a wide variety of materials should be employed, including material from introductory college textbooks in order to avoid annui, to stimulate, and to provide maximum opportunities for the transfer of skills learned. After each student has been diagnosed, he should meet with his teacher and his counselor so that he can understand what his skills needs are and then together they should agree on specific performance objectives.

Since the emphasis in this suggested program is on learning rather than teaching, the teacher is the learning facilitator. Each objective must have a set of learning experiences, designed to help the student achieve the objective.

Ideally, each learning experience would include the following stages:

1. Introductory — The point at which the teacher provides some means of diagnosis for the learning

facilitator, helps students make connections with their own experience, motivates, and provides conceptual background.

2. Development, analysis, study - The skills are introduced, learned, and practiced.

3. Generalization - Experiences are offered which help students to internalize, restate or redo in and on their own terms. For example, after many experiences in which a student categories relevant and irrelevant details, he then is led to experiences in which he can compare and contrast what he had to do in exercises to select relevant and irrelevant details.

4. Application, summary, culmination - Finally the student applies the techniques which he used in steps two and three to separate relevant details to various college subjects: biology, math problems, education, literature, etc. (He applies what is known in a new context). If the student does this successfully, it can be concluded that he has learned the particular skill.

Evaluation would consist of the entire system of diagnosis, setting the objectives, the establishment of 'baselines' for learning and establishing change and progress. Evaluation should be on-going to be meaningful. Because there are no standardized tests which measure all objectives set in this or any program, evaluation should be multi-faceted:

1. Observation of performance and application of skills learned
2. Taped responses

3. Anecdotal records
4. Self-evaluation measures
5. Objective achievement tests

Each learning objective should have its concommitant learning experiences and baseline for establishing change and progress (evaluation).

A vital or crucial adjunct to the curricular component is counseling of inner-city college students. There are several writings on the role of the counselor in this setting, but often the clients or students are regarded as a homogeneous lot. True, there have been many problems in the past between white counselors and the needs of Black students, but the problems in an Open Admissions inner-city college go beyond that. Program planners must know the population they will serve - and it will be found that Open Admissions students include large number of American-born Blacks, Black people from the West Indies, Black people for whom English is a second language (from Africa, Haiti, and South America), and large numbers of older Black people - over 30 years of age.

Interspersed with these groups are "others" - namely Spanish-speaking people, Orientals, Whites of various ethnic groups, people from the Middle East, - all reflecting the larger society.

Each group represents a different cultural background, and each person within each group has a different life space. Presumably, all have the same goals in common, which are illustrated by their attendance at the college. The counselors' problems therefore, include finding ways of reconciling conflicts between cultural background, life space, and the educational setting and goals. This means that the counselors must be aware of social history, the

elements which make us the way we are, of the inter-group dynamics outside of the college, of the value system of each group, and of their own attitudes and values. Counselors must be able to interpret standard assessment results within the framework of each student's and each group's background in order to avoid the traditional labeling and low expectations of students' future academic performance.

There have been references to the high correlation between students' basic skills needs and their financial needs. Therefore, counselors should be prepared to help refer students in the basic needs areas - health or medical assistance, lodgings, emergency loans, and food sources. Students cannot be expected to perform academically if they cannot feed themselves and their children or if they have just been evicted.

Counselors should become familiar with the academic aspects of the program with which they work so that they can assist students in goal-setting and in resolving any conflicts in this area. They should represent an intimate extension of the learning process and can only do this by frequent classroom and workshop visits so that they actually experience the goals, the tone, the mood of the work sessions.

In summary, those of us in inner city Open Admissions colleges should examine our present freshman programs. Are they designed to meet the needs of the incoming underskilled freshman? Are they designed to help him succeed academically? Are we prepared to handle possible negative attitudes and habits which interfere with academic success? Do we provide time in the program for frequent one-to-one

conferences? Do we provide opportunities for transfer of skills learned? The suggestions offered in this paper offer some alternatives to the traditional perfunctory "remedial" programs which open the doors to hundreds of students and then fail to lend them a hand so they won't trip over the door sill.

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